

Adult Education could face budget ax from Santa Cruz City Schools

By SHANNA MCCORD - Santa Cruz Sentinel

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SANTA CRUZ - If federal and state funding for education falls through this year, Santa Cruz City Schools could have to trim the already-downsized Adult Education program.

City Schools leaders plan to give preliminary layoff notices Wednesday to the program's temporary and permanent teachers in the wake of uncertain government financing.

Superintendent Gary Bloom said the move is designed to give the district flexibility to make program reductions later in the year, if needed, after Gov. Jerry Brown's budget becomes final and federal funding is solidified.

"The district has to protect its liability. We can't take the risk of ensuring employment if we're not sure about the dollars coming in," Bloom said. "We need that flexibility if the budget goes south. The range of possibilities is wider than ever before."

City Schools Adult Education, which serves about 6,000 students and offers nearly 100 classes in subjects that range from general education development to introductory Spanish, is funded primarily through grants, class fees, donations and a small portion, about \$176,000, from the district's general fund.

City Schools has slashed \$1.4 million from the adult education budget in the past couple of years, and the state has stopped supporting the programs.

The County Office of Education supports adult education with a \$100,000 grant for general education development and the Beach Flats preschool program, which is expected to continue next year. At stake in the federal funding debate under way in Washington, D.C. is about \$100,000 for the district's adult education, which won't be confirmed until May or June.

Without the money, program reductions likely will be made, Bloom said.

Board President Cynthia Hawthorne said the district is committed to preserving adult education to the greatest extent that is financially possible.

"This is just in case they don't pull it together at the federal level," Hawthorne said. "We are staying committed to adult education, especially (general education development). We're not chopping or ending the program. We will still have an adult education program."

Marjorie Klepp, who has taught the adult education's Parent Education Nursery School for eight years and is one of seven preschool teachers receiving a layoff notice, said she understands the notice is more of a "formality" than anything else.

The Parent Education Nursery School raised the bulk of its operating costs through donations.

"We were laid off last spring and rehired," Klepp said. "It's all an unknown, it is unsettling. I wish we could be expanding and providing for more families in the community."

Adult education has been hit in other school

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districts because of budget constraints.

Pajaro Valley Unified School District agreed last week to chop \$1 million from its Adult Education as part of \$3.5 million in budget cuts, despite dozens of people pleading with district leaders to preserve the program.

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